Integrating Narrative Fiction with Business Ethics to Enhance Moral Reasoning Applying an Ethical Framework and Case Discussion Instructional Model

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Abstract

The use of fiction in business education is by no means a new methodology, but seemingly, one that has not been universally embraced as an effective learning tool. The purest may even suggest that fiction has little or no place in serious business curricula. An academic commentator notes: The relationship between literature and ideas, for using literature as a social evidence or testimony, is not new. Dillard (1982), observed that the fiction writer is a thoughtful interpreter of the world who does not use traditional research or criticism to interpret, but who, instead, produces an object of art which itself must be interpreted. What fiction offers, however, according to Dillard, is a way of dealing "with things limited disciplines of thought either ignored completely or destroyed by methodological caution." The question ultimately is not whether fiction is used as a learning tool; but how best used. In essence, how do we cook the vegetables without losing the nutrients in the process?

> If you want to get at truth, you have to write (or read) fiction.
>
> --Unknown

Introduction

In the article "Business Ethics in Fiction," Ellen Kennedy and Leigh Lawton (1992) write that "literature can be a powerful force, involving and moving readers in ways that the current dominant pedagogies— cases and 'war stories'—cannot match. The format raises fascinating questions that are often overlooked in introductory courses. Students are interested in the plot and the fate of the characters, and are consequently highly motivated to understand the integrated business concepts.

Patricia Brieschke (1990), in her article on the administrator in fiction, describes the fiction writer's emotional content that he or she seeks to communicate as an experience to the reader on the same visceral level. "The author has a passionate involvement in the material, bringing to the novel what the researcher, who may value scientific detachment, cannot".

According to Mendelson-Maoz (2007), art and philosophy, aesthetics and ethics, have exhibited strong ties throughout human history.

In particular, the dual commitment of literature to aesthetic principles and narrative themes and the dual commitments of ethics to abstract models and to human experience have created multifaceted bonds between the two disciplines.

Literature can illustrate philosophical ideas and illuminate actual moral life, it can "supply the kind of experience need to develop a person's faculty of moral judgment" (DePaul 1988; 563), and by animating the actual performance of certain ethical issues can "bridge the gap between abstract ethical principles and the concrete circumstances of real cases" (Tomlinson 1997; 126). Philosophy can explore moral concepts and examine moral theories through literary texts. Often, literary texts put complex situations under a new light, and hence create an opportunity for thought experiments (Currie 1998; 176) and ethical expeditions (McGinn 1977, 177). Literature can serve as a moral laboratory (Hakermulder 2000), a secure and imaginary space where one can question beliefs and practices, gain back lost concepts (Diamond 1983, 1988), test theories and their applications, simulate different scenarios and formulate desirable principles.

Purpose: The purpose of this presentation is to explore the use of an appropriate method of case discussion, to illustrate fundamental business ethics that will engage students in ethical reasoning and thinking; through the integration of narrative fiction.

Placing the Debate into Perspective

Psychologists once scoffed at fiction as a way of understanding people because—well—it's made up. But in the past 25 years cognitive psychologists have developed a new appreciation for the significance of stories. Just as computer simulations have helped us understand perception, learning and thinking, stories are simulations of a kind that can help readers understand not just the characters in books but human character in general. In 1986 psychologist Jerome Bruner, now at New York University School of Law, argued persuasively that narrative is a distinctive and important mode of thought. It elaborates our conceptions of human or humanlike agents and explores how their intentions collide with reality.

The psychology of <u>fiction</u> is a small but growing area of research, according to Keith Oatley (2008), a professor in the department of human development and applied psychology at the University of Toronto and a published novelist himself, who details the latest findings in the area in his online magazine, <u>OnFiction</u>.

One of his own studies, carried out in 2008, gave 166 participants either the Chekhov short story, The Lady with the Little Dog, or a version of the story rewritten in documentary form. The subjects' personality traits and emotions were assessed before and after reading, with those who were given the Chekhov story in its unadulterated form found to have gone through greater changes in personality – empathizing with the characters and thus becoming a little more like them.

"I think the reason fiction but not non-fiction has the effect of improving empathy is because fiction is primarily about selves interacting with other selves in the social world," said Oatley. "The subject matter of fiction is constantly about why she did this, or if that's the case what should he do now, and so on. With fiction we enter into a world in which this way of thinking predominates. We can think about it in terms of the psychological concept of expertise. If I read fiction, this kind of social thinking is what I get better at. If I read genetics or astronomy, I get more expert at genetics or astronomy. In fiction, also, we are able to understand characters' actions from their interior point of view, by entering into their situations and minds, rather than the more exterior view of them that we usually have.

And it turns out that psychologically there is a big difference between these two points of view. We usually take the exterior view of others, but that's too limited."

The findings could, Oatley believes, have significant implications, particularly in a climate where arts' funding is under threat. "It is the first empirical finding, so far as I know, to show a clear psychological effect of reading fiction," he said. "It's a result that shows that reading fiction improves understanding of others, and this has a very basic importance in society, not just in the general way making the world a better place by improving interpersonal understanding, but in specific areas such as politics, business, and education. In an era when high-school and university subjects are evaluated economically, our results do have economic implications."

Kennedy and Lawton (1992), further noted that with the increase in emphasis on ethics in colleges and universities across the US; there was a need to examine the effectiveness of current instructional methods. Stories can stir emotions, stimulate imagination, and involve and compel readers to enact for themselves the dilemmas of fictional characters. Literature offers a compelling methodology, which, when used alone or in combination with more traditional techniques, can enrich the teaching of business ethics. With the proliferation of ethics instruction throughout undergraduate and graduate curricula alike, both as separate courses and as components within other courses, a major question arose as to the quality and pedagogy of business ethics instruction. Wiles and Wiles (1991, p. 299), suggest that "the quality of instruction might be enhanced through a multidisciplinary approach"

As earlier noted by Kennedy and Lawton (1992), the prevailing mode of teaching business ethics in the United States at the time generally involved a reliance on "war stories", that is, factual recounting of actual workplace incidents, their ethical and moral implications, and comparison with actual responses taken; and reliance on case studies, both actual and hypothetical, as a tool for providing illustrative material. A content analysis of twelve U.S. business ethics textbooks (1) from eight major publishers, most published between 1989 and 1991, revealed that the majority of the texts utilized a combination of essays, case studies, and questions that can be used for class discussion based on the issues derived from the case examples. In an excellent discussion of current pedagogy in business ethics, Derry and Green (1989) noted that, in the sample of business ethics texts which they reviewed, there was a sad lack of dialogue between theory and case analyses. They went on to note that "the further development of such dialogue between theory and practice is one of the purposes served by the study of business ethics… But at least in this sample of business ethic texts, this purpose remains an unfulfilled promise" (p.531). Virtually none of the texts provided any additional pedagogical sources for illustrating ethical dilemmas, conflicts, or resolutions, for promoting this broader intellectual "dialogue" that is called for by Wiles and Wiles (1991).

However, Solomon's thesis (in Freeman, 1991) was that we should read books to educate our emotions; he stated that what we read in stories can develop our emotions and our sense of ethics (p.197). Solomon did not specifically suggest the reading of business-oriented fiction. It is our belief that reading fiction dealing with business issues, conflicts, and dilemmas can enlighten and sensitize us to issues of business ethics in a way that generates insights that are perhaps different from those arising in the study of cases.

The Place of Literature in the Study of Organizations

The role of narrative fiction in the study of organizations was addressed as early as 1976 (Czarniawska-Joerges and Monthoux 1994: 7). Despite this, very little research and interest in the topic followed, although Monthoux's work provides an exception (Monthoux 1979, Czarniawska-Joerges and Monthoux 1994). More recently there has been a mild resurgence of interest in the topic. Writers such as Phillips (1995) and Alverez and Merchan (1992) have brought to the discussion post-modern concepts of narrative and story-telling in the organizational setting. Alverez and Merchan believe that narrative fiction has a pervasive claim in management education. They give two reasons for this. Firstly, the emergence of the concept of corporate culture, and its emphasis on values and their embeddedness in organizational symbols, myths and stories has created a role for organizational storytelling. Secondly, the acknowledgment of the importance of an ethical dimension in business has led some management schools to use fiction as a way of teaching moral issues. Given the interest in critical thinking within management it would not be surprising if this link with post-modern theory focuses new attention on the topic.

Making the Case: Why Read Fiction?

In an essay, the Pulitzer-prize-winning writer Robert Penn Warren argued cogently and with passion for the necessity of reading fiction to experience conflict, to vent emotions, and to come to resolution about the nature and meaning of that human condition of conflict (1989). His argument revolved around the fact that conflict is at the very center of life. We have a human need to experience conflict to develop a sense of heightened reality, of life felt with drama and intensity. Fiction allows us to vent the emotions surrounding the conflict even more fully than in real life because of the imaginary quality of fiction; in addition, resolution is promised within it pages. Warren further noted …among our deprived selves we must confront the redeemed as well as the damned, the saintly as well as the wicked, and strangely enough, either confrontation may be both humbling and strengthening. In having some awareness of the complexity of self we are better prepared to deal with that self…our entering into the fictional process helps to redefine the dominant self…the knowledge in such confrontations comes…as imaginative enactment (Warren, 1989. p. 5).

We undergo an arousal of suspense concerning the nature of that resolution and its ultimate meaning for us. We also take on various roles vicariously through our reading that allow us, through imaginative enactment, to know things otherwise beyond our understanding. This high level of involvement, vicarious role-taking, suspense, conflict, and resolution lead us to new levels of knowing that both affective and cognitive and which leads us to "a judgment of values" (p. 6).

Robert Coles, psychiatrist and author of the Call of Stories (1989), talked about the wonderful mimetic power of a novel or a story can have – its capacity to work its way well into one's thinking life, yes, but also one's reveries or idle thoughts, even one's moods and dreams… So it goes, this immediacy that a story can possess, as it connects so persuasively with human experience…a person's moral conduct responding to the moral imagination of writers and the moral imperative of fellow human beings in need (pp. 204-205).

Kennedy and Lawton maintain that it is this broad level of involvement and response to fiction that leads us to explore the use of stories as a vehicle for approaching dilemmas in the domain of business.

They suggest, therefore, that through reading imaginary and imaginative dramatizations of business dilemmas, students will develop new and perhaps greater awareness of the complexity of the ethical and moral dilemmas contained therein than they achieve through either essays or through the use of case studies. Narratives also provide students with a clear picture of a problem; through the heightened realism of a story, we are able to see very clearly what the main characters are struggling with.

Ethics and Literature: An Introduction

Without storytelling there is no theory of ethics (Miller 1987; 3)

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Mendelson-Maoz further contends that philosophy can explore moral concepts and examine moral theories through literary texts. Often, literary texts put complex situations under a new light, and hence create an opportunity for thought experiments (Currie 1998; 176) and ethical expeditions (McGinn 1997, 177). Literature can serve as a moral laboratory (Hakermulder 2000), a secure and imaginary space where one can question beliefs and practices, gain back lost concepts (Diamond 1983, 1988), test theories and their applications, simulate different scenarios and stances, and formulate desirable principles.

Literature as Case Material

Greenwood (2000), postulates that the literature on this topic focuses on similarities and the differences between literature and social science case writing. Phillips (1995) emphasizes the similarities between the practices of the two. He claims that social scientists often do what writers do; they create rather than discover, they focus on the unique and the individual and they use illusion and rhetoric to make their case. Similarly, writers often act like social scientists: they test ideas against evidence, they generalize; they pose testable questions about the social world; and they try to remain faithful to details of external experience. He suggests, therefore that there is an overlapping of boundaries, and that there is no specific point at which social science ends and narrative fiction begins.

On the other hand, authors emphasize the primacy of the novel over more scientific case studies. Literature offers the possibility to move outside traditional forms of documentation and analysis. It provides organizational theorists with new ways of talking about organizations, and new things to talk about (Phillips 1995). It offers an opportunity to present the organization in all its truly complex and contradictory forms, since in literature more room exists for doubt, uncertainty, contradiction and paradox. No sense of closure is present; no singular solution is demanded. The novel describes knowledge without necessarily analyzing it, thus avoiding the scientific tendency to absurd reductionism (Czarniawska-Joerges and Monthoux 1994). The novel tells a story over time, and many different viewpoints can be included in the text; in this sense it is 'live'. Easton (1995) differentiates between case studies that are 'live' and case studies that are 'dead'. A dead case presents all the information at the start. For a case to be live it must find a way to inject information over time.

Narrative fiction also provides a medium for dealing with the affective aspects of organizational experience. It allows the reader to experience and discuss the fear, humor, lust, envy and ambition that drive so much of the behavior in organizations (Phillips 1995). It draws the reader into an understanding of subjective individual experiences. The novel can reflect the temporality and individuality of experiences, and its location in different cultures and traditions. It may provide insight into organizational forms that no longer exist or that may exist in the future. The novel also gives the opportunity to use Weberian 'deal types' in organizational analysis (Czarniawska-Joerges and Monthoux 1994), Caricatures, ironic portraits, satires, metaphors can emphasize, clarify or illustrate organizational behavior and events; anecdote and rhetoric can be used to support a particular line of argument without invoking methodological distinctions. This use of fiction can provide a setting and an ambience that adds life and interest to academic articles. It can evoke feelings and images, and can provide atmosphere to otherwise dry academic discussion.

Michaelson (2005), states that part of the value of stories is moral, in that understanding them, and the characters within them, is on way in which we seek to make moral sense of life. Arguably, it has become quite common to use stories in order to make moral sense of business life. Case method is the standard teaching method in top business schools, and so-called "war stories" are customary for on-the-job training. Shakespeare is a trendy purveyor of leadership education. Several books and articles have been written on the intersection between literature and business and/or business ethics. Still, it is one thing to claim that literature can contribute to our understanding of business conduct, but yet another to claim that literature can contribute to the related goal of improving moral conduct in business. Supporters of the claims tend to presume they go together, while skeptics and detractors often discard them as a package. These claims warrant further investigation if they are to be perceived by business scholarship and practice as worthy of serious attention, not just a quaint search for lowbrow moral fables or a vain pursuit of highbrow poetry. One instrumental function of literature is to imitate life, thereby expanding our vision beyond our parochial interests; to see literature merely as a didactic instrument to serve business interests misses the point that literature should expand our understanding, our sense of what in addition to business is interesting and valuable.

Michaelson further notes that several books and articles have been written on the intersection between literature and business and/or business ethics, contending or observing that fictional works are fertile ground for practicing or enlarging reality ("Fiction holds students' attention better… writer [are] 'navigators' and 'antennae of the race,' who excel at spotting important trends and issues early" (Beynen, 1999, p. 1502, in a review of Williams, 1997)) "The assumption of this work is that some stories and their images have the capacity to widen our vision and open our eyes to what is really important" (Williams, 1997, p. 7)), comparing reality to a model of success or failure (Certain fictional works "have continuing relevance to our time in showing us how an addiction to self-interest and efficiency can permeate our culture and what is consequences are likely to be" Brawer, 1998, p. 142)), or engaging in self-justification ("In these post-Enron days of corporate scandal, some of the millions of copies of *Atlas Shrugged* that have been sold over 45 years are being dusted off by executives under siege by prosecutors, regulators, Congress, employees, investors, a Republican president, even terrorist" (Jones, 2002)).

Which Stories to Consider

Michaelson suggest that reading about moral bankruptcy and loss may satisfy human voyeurism, which may explain why it is easier to identify business literature about (morally) bad businesspersons – for example, Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice,* Cowperwood in Dreiser's *The Financier,* Bounderby in Dickens' *Hard Times,* and management in general in Sinclair's *The Jungle.* Even Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* is arguably intended to create moral ambivalence about those who she wants to characterize as heroes of capitalism. Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is less a tragedy of individual arrogance and more a tragedy of collective human failure in a market context.

It is hard enough to identify so-called "classic" works of literature that are "about" business, he contends, and harder still to identify ones that are "about" ethical business. This may explain in part why moral imagination theorist have not extensively addressed the role of imaginative literature in ethics generally and business ethics specifically, despite the fact that literature, and literary analysis, is evidently devoted to or can facilitate the work that moral imagination asks: self-examination, sympathetic examination, objective interpretation, anticipation, and evaluation. But just as the claims that literature can contribute to our understanding and improvement of business conduct cannot be restricted by the didactic message of the literature we choose, we should not be restricted by theme in choosing appropriate works for this project. The crux of his exposition: *Dealing with Swindlers and Devils: Literature and Business Ethics;* has already illustrated two examples of non-business stories – *"The Emperor's New Clothes" and the Faust legend* – working in business. These examples according to Michaelson; should stimulate more imaginative research on what works of literature can accomplish the goals of moral understanding and improvement in business.

Some Ethical Frameworks

Revisiting Kennedy and Lawton (1992), they suggest some ethical frameworks that are suggested for use by Laczniak (1983) in addressing ethical problems in marketing. Murphy and Laczniak (1981) list well over one hundred articles dealing with the topic of ethics in marketing; they conclude that marketing is the function within business firms most often charged with ethical abuse" (p. 251). Since marketing is the domain which attracts the greatest attention for ethical violations and misdemeanors, the frameworks presented by Laczniak are used here as being most applicable to a variety of business ethics dilemmas. As Laczniak notes, each frame work goes beyond the utilitarian rule of the greatest good for the greatest number. Often a rationale for free-market capitalism, utilitarianism has generated significant criticism because it focuses on desirable ends with little regard for the means by which those ends are achieved.

The first of these frameworks is the *Prima Facie Duties Framework* of Ross (1930). As Laczniak notes, Ross was the first philosopher to specify a list of the major ethical responsibilities facing any person. He also offers a paradigm that is a supplement to utilitarianism. Ross presents several duties that constitute moral obligations (summary information here is taken from Laczniak, 1983):

Duties of fidelity, stemming from previous actions taken. For example, duties of fidelity include remaining faithful to contracts and promises, telling the truth, and redressing wrongful acts.

Duties of gratitude, acts other people have taken towards the person or the organization under focus. Examples include special obligations that exist between relatives, friends, associates, etc.

Duties of justice, which are the obligation to distribute rewards based on merit, and also the obligation for justice beyond the letter of the law.

Duties of beneficence, which are duties taken to improve the intelligence, virtue, or happiness of others; the duty to do good.

Duties of self-improvement, actions taken to improve our personal virtue, intelligence, or happiness, and generally increase our moral self-interest.

Duties of non malfeasance, duties not to injure others.

This framework is certainly not exhaustive according to Kennedy and Lawton (1992), but provides an interesting point from which to examine moral and ethical dilemmas. A crucial feature of this framework is that it gives little direction as to choices occurring when one's ethical obligations and duties conflict.

A second framework that of Garrett (1966); was developed specifically with business managers in mind. The framework expresses a utilitarian concern for outcomes but specifies that intentions and means cannot be justified by the ends, that is, proportionality must exist between these three components.

The final framework that examines dilemmas in fiction is that of Rawls (1971), a social justice framework. There are two driving principles of justice inherent in this perspective: Liberty, each person having an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others; and difference, social and economic inequalities arranged so that they are both to the greatest benefit to the most disadvantaged and attached to positions and offices open to all. This emphasizes the fact that "it would be unethical to exploit one group for the benefit of others" (p.21).

The question for consideration is how can we use these straightforward models to create memorable examples in the minds of ethic students? The vignettes typically reported in textbooks are brief, a contextual, not filled with affective content, and not well able to work their way into our "thinking life, reveries, moods, thought, and dreams." But the call of stories, the power of that fictional narrative to engage with passion and to transform, can empower each of us with the resolution to examine our own lives in morally and ethically coherent ways.

Derry and Green (1989), as noted, called for renewed attention to the lack of a dialogue between ethical theory and its applications in case analysis. Applying ethical frameworks to fiction illustrates the promise of fiction in promoting and illuminating this dialogue. Stories arouse attention and create a clear focus on the dilemma. It is at this point of engagement that theories can be introduced to provide a framework for wrestling with the dilemmas.

Kennedy and Lawton suggest that there are many excellent selections in literature which force the reader to grapple with situations in which various duties presented by Ross's conflict. A stirring, painful, yet poignant example of such a dilemma arising from this kind of duty occurs in Arthur Miller's play *"All My Sons" (1947).* Another dramatic example of conflicting duties is presented in Herman Melville's short story *"Bartleby" (1856).* Sloan Wilson's classic 1955 novel "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit" also illustrates conflicting responsibilities. Garrett's Proportionality Framework provides an interesting paradigm for discussing Saul Bernstein's handling of a legal dispute between Tom Rath and old Edward Schultz. Garrett's framework can also be applied to Milo Minderbinder, a character in Joseph Heller's *"Catch 22".* During World War II, Milo, the consummate entrepreneur, forms a syndicate to which both the Americans and Germans belong.

<u>Louis Auchincloss' (1989</u>) short story, *"The Senior Partner's Ethics,"* lends itself to analysis using Garrett's framework. And, <u>John Steinbeck's</u> "*Grapes of Wrath (1939*)" relates to Rawls' Social Justice Framework as Steinbeck relentlessly explores the boundaries of the liberty and difference principles throughout the story.

Oakley and Lynch point to the need for more than minimal definitions of ethics for business students in their contention that "Managers need a workable framework within which to analyze the dilemmas that commonly arise as well as a compass to guide their behavior" (200, p. 378); we can begin to train students in working within such frameworks by using literary situations as case scenarios to begin learning the techniques of analysis and decision-making. Using case studies is a very common method in ethics courses, and journal-keeping is also becoming an increasingly popular method, as evidenced by the promotion of programs such as the Pathfinder Pragmatic Inquiry method, which uses "a narrative or personal story for investigation, interpretation, and action when written in a journal," with the ultimate goal of providing "a way for people to discover and tell their stories and exchange their belief, based on and discovered through their life experiences in corporate cultures" (Nahser and Ruhe, 2001, p. 318). However, case studies may be problematic when used to present decision-making scenarios to students for their lack of complexity; the "use of literature helps to overcome the standard student complaint regarding cases: there isn't enough sufficient information to make a sound decision" (Shepard et al., 1997, p. 44).

This technique of using fictional situations to determine larger truths is fundamental to the way literary academics have furthered social and cultural scholarship; for English faculty to teach analytical skills to business students could yield the greater understanding of issues under consideration through the important use of stories in business education, as Nahser an Ruhe (2001, p. 319) maintain. To employ humanities faculty in this way directly addresses a concern of business faculty who, according to Alfonso Oddo, don't teach ethics because of "curriculum constraints, lack of subject materials, and lack of ability" (Oddo, 1997, p. 294).

Making the Connection

Ethical frameworks are the substance of traditional text in undergraduate and graduate Business Ethics courses. They establish the moral foundations for which individuals claim a position or take a stand; and are necessary for the engagement in ethical reasoning and thinking.   Therefore, they are important. However, they are part of a process – not an answer. According to Cooke (1990) ethics is the process of determining what are; and what are not reasonable standards of moral conduct. This process is normative, not descriptive or sociological.   Simply put, ethics attempts to determine what these reasonable standards are by systematically addressing at least three basic questions: (1) What is morally good or bad? (2) What is morally right or wrong? (3) What are my moral obligations, if any? The literature reviewed suggests an augmentation of narrative fiction to engage the reader and stir "the moral imagination" and capture our moral attention.

Case method teaching is assisted by the use of analytical framework. Decision-making frameworks have been developed by a number of different authors. Many of these frameworks are grounded in ethical theory, and in general they use references to normative ethical criteria and procedural maxims and caveats. For example, Northcott has identified ten core values which provide 'guideposts' for ethical decision making (Northcott 1995). These are: caring; honesty; accountability; promise keeping; pursuit of excellence; loyalty; fairness; integrity; respect and responsible citizenship. Whilst there are real differences between some of these frameworks, there are also strong similarities.

Most writers use a model of case analysis which involves a summary of the case (key players and events), identification of the issues and discussion of the issues raised by the details of the case, development of criteria for evaluating the case, development of alternative courses of action for the various players, evaluation of these alternatives, and finally a recommendation as to the most preferred course of action. This simple outline will form the basis of the case analysis that follows.

The Approach

A useful discussion model selected for this approach is *"Conducting an Ethics Case Discussion"*, by Manuel Velasquez, Ph.D., Center for Applied Ethics Santa Clara University.

Velasquez's model is set out in the form of seven "steps". He notes however, this term and its connotations should not be taken too seriously. The model is not intended to be used as a rigid series of seven well-defined stages, each of which must be completed before moving on to the next one in a series. Instructors will find that sometimes it is better if students skip around among these seven steps during a discussion, and that moving to one of the later steps, and then returning to an earlier one is often more productive than moving through each in a lock-step fashion. There is, however, a logical progression among the steps, and generally the later steps build upon the understandings developed in the earlier steps. Described very simply, the model consists of having students move through the following seven steps in the course of a classroom discussion of a case:

> Determine the relevant facts.
> Identify the ethical issues.
> Develop alternatives for resolving the issues
> Define the stakeholders for each alternative.
> Evaluate the ethics of each alternative
> Take stock of the practical constraints
> Decide on and plan implementation of an alternative.

This framework is built upon three (3) levels of analysis: individual; organizational; and systematic. The work below shall address those levels as well as challenge moral decision-making along the way.

The Exhibit

The work of fiction that shall be employed in this analysis is a novel by Fontaine, (2011), titled: "So what's in the Petri Dish, Dr. Periwinkle? This is a satire currently under consideration by the curriculum program teams in the College of Management and Business at National Louis University, Chicago, Illinois, as a special topic in the graduate and undergraduate ethics courses; and the ethics course in the health care leadership program.   This presentation provides an excellent forum to examine this work's application.

Methodology

At the beginning of the course, the students are given the assignment to read the novel. A handout explaining the general purpose of the assignment; the intended and suggested format for discussion will include each student offering a 3-minute oral assessment of his/her experience reading the book. This assessment will include the student's thoughts and feelings about the storyline, the relevance of material learned for future endeavors, and the helpfulness (or not) of learning through fiction.

A take-home multiple choice test will be designed by the author associating perceived behaviors with theoretical frameworks learned during the course. The test will be distributed and returned before the end of the last session. Finally, the students will anonymously complete a 25-item questionnaire seeking responses on a 5-point Likert scale. At the last class meeting, a discussion of the novel will be held.

The Petri Dish Discussion

We begin with a (I) Situation analysis: A summary of the case:
What's it like to know that your future and a decision that could possibly change your future in a huge way is going to be decided not as much by scientists, but by politicians?

That's exactly what Dr. Oliver Periwinkle learns only after a few months as Chair of the Albert Einstein Department of Science and Technology at Belvedere Crossing University. Excited by the prospect of joining the faculty of one of the nation's pre-eminent research institutions in the fall of 2000; he brings with him the promise of a significant federal grant to continue a highly controversial Stem cell initiative. Obviously life is good. But as quickly as fortunes can blossom, they can turn, and turn they do as a bizarre series of events start to unfold. Funds appropriated toward the end of one presidential administration, are abruptly rescinded shortly after the inauguration of another.

So begins the often amusing and delightful romp through the 'Halls of Letters' that chronicle a litany of asinine behavior, a gluttony of academic has-beens, political crackpots, government double-talk and of course—corruption and greed. 'So what's in the Petri dish' is set in a university environment fractured by cynicism and an insanity that has run-a-muck. Periwinkle encounters a host of good guys and bad guys, G-men and 'Wise-guys' in a brush with Nobel Prize fortune and fame; corporate espionage and congressional hearings where "*I have no recollection of that Senator",* more often than not is bellowed by just about anyone with something to hide. It is an exaggeration of the absurd—a microcosm that peeks behind its own closed doors, secret files, and clandestine meetings only to discover time and time again, 'the enemy is us'.

'So what's in the Petri dish' is the coming of age of a naïve latter day scholar who is indoctrinated to a culture of perpetual chaos as a university transforms in the midst of perhaps one of the greatest scientific discoveries of our time. Here we get a glimpse of idealism as it comes face to face with reality while society struggles with a phenomenon that will ultimately shape and define its values.

'So what's in the Petri dish chronicles this country's continental divide surrounding the ethics and efficacy of the controversial embryonic stem cell debate. Periwinkle discovers that practically everyone he encounters harbors some ulterior motivation – a sinister side of the human condition that is such that not all people are good, even middling-good. He realizes that some are extremely weak and unreliable, and others, for whatever reasons, are just plain evil. In the general case, he comes to understand that every one of us sometimes does what we know we ought not to do, and does not do what we know we ought to do. Despairingly, each of us, in the old-fashioned word, sometimes sins. This fact about human beings places any workable human system under severe constraints. With the guidance of the unlikeliest of ally, Periwinkle gradually learns that no wise system is designed to be peopled only by saints; there are not enough saints to people a whole system. (And the few there are can be at times impossible to live with). A wise system he reconciles; need only to supply remedies for the moral defects of all.

Characters

Our first inquiry will be an exploration of the book's central characters as moral commentaries. Here the discussion will center on their 'moral compasses', e.g., the altruistic, alchemist Oliver Periwinkle; the undervalued Dr. Denise Callaway; the unscrupulous and narcissistic University President Ambrose; the tightfisted, financier, Board President, Madge Faber; and the prodigy, Jerry Rosenbloom. Here we will examine their motivations to discover what makes these people 'tick'. The discussion also provides the opportunity to talk about Professor Carol Gilligan's (1982) view that men and women practice differing approaches to moral decision making. Gilligan's position, in brief, is that women tend to base moral decisions on notions of caring, support and responsiveness while men tend to seek more impersonal, universal standards bounded in justice, impartiality and clear right/wrong distinctions. One study of business students found that some of the empirical evidence investigating differences in ethical conduct by gender found that men were more than twice as likely as women to express a willingness to engage in unethical conduct (Betz et al., 1989).

(II) Ethical Issues: identification and discussion of theory based ethical issues, e.g., the morality and efficacy of embryonic stem cell research.

(III) Who are the primary stakeholders: the university, biotechnology, and the government; even society-at-large.

(IV) What are the possible alternatives? Accordingly, the case study must include the consideration of alternative courses of action by the players (Greenwood, 2000). The 'real' outcome of the case is only one of many potential courses of action. Greenwood asserts that it is important to be creative at this stage, since this process can produce an enormous number of alternatives. The evaluation criteria, if already developed, will naturally provide such a method. The students can be encouraged to respond from their personal perspective (e.g., what should Periwinkle have done? What would you have done if you were Periwinkle?

(V) The alternatives should be evaluated against the agreed upon criteria. Who will the alternatives impact and how?

(VI) What are the practical constraints? Students should be asked whether there are any systemic, organizational, or individual factors operating in the case that would prevent or stand in the way of carrying out the preferred alternative, from a systemic point of view, for example, are there any laws, competitive pressures, or industry practices that are relevant to the decision? From an organization point of view, are there any university policies, university constraints, or elements in the university culture that would stand in the way of, or assist in carrying out the preferred alternative? And, from the standpoint of the individual, are there any pressures from superiors, personal risks and hardships, or personal financial constraints that stand in the way? Are there any significant uncertainties that may cast doubt on the reliability of one's ethical conclusions?

(VII) What actions should be taken? A choice is made. The recommendation of a particular course of action must be understood in the context of the decision-making process, particularly with respect to the criteria used for evaluation. It should be clear from the previous stages why this particular outcome is considered most favorable.

Conclusion

This writer supports the assertions of Greenwood (2000). A management ethics program should take advantage of both traditional and non-traditional case material.

Whether the student is a naïve undergraduate or a seasoned manager, the use of one type of material exclusively has potential downfalls. Reliance on traditional material entirely risks the development of routine, boring, narrow courses and poses the ever present difficulty of finding suitable material. On the other hand, dependence on literature exclusively exposes the course to being seen as esoteric, impractical or even trivial. It is recommended that a program begin with traditional material to provide a solid basis for the discussion of ethical issues and the understanding of case analysis technique.

The introduction of non-traditional cases (literature) later in the program will provide students with a broader and more intense experience and with the possibly of a wider and more intense exploration of ethical issues. Kennedy and Lawton (1992) purport that narratives show the impact of business decisions on all aspects of both business and personal life. They insist that our students will see the effects of compassion, ruthlessness, and sensitivity; stories will stimulate their experience of recognizing and experiencing moral dilemmas. Theories will guide them to the recognition of the personal costs of their actions. The ultimate goal is to develop in students the ability to recognize the multifaceted nature of dilemmas and to resolve those dilemmas in ways that promote social and moral integration.

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